

BULGARIAN FARMLAND REFORM
Back to the Future
by
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There are about 10 million acres of cropland in Bulgaria, about the same as Ohio. Small grains dominate much of the hilly rural landscape. Large productive river valleys in central and northern Bulgaria are in the 100 to 300 foot elevation range. The latitude is the same as Ohio, but the climate is quite different. Little rainfall comes during the summer growing months. Irrigation is necessary for summer crops.

Bulgarian Farm History

At the end of World War II private farms averaging 50 acres were privately owned and relied mostly on hand and animal power. Peasant farmers were productive and knew how to earn a living from small-scale agriculture. Collectivization began with the 1946 Agrarian Reform Law. Land ownership was limited to 75 acres in the mountainous areas and 50 acres in the valleys. Farmers were "encouraged" to pool their land into community "cooperative farms" and received rent for land they contributed. Typical villages operated 1500 to 2000 acre cooperative farms. By the mid-1950's "voluntary pooling" was replaced by "forced cooperation."

In the mid-1960's, village farms were grouped into larger operating units. Rent for land "brought" to the co-ops was discontinued and farmers became "state employees." By the 1970's the largest agro-industrial complexes (TKZc's) had reached 250,000 acres. Small-

scale agriculture was a thing of the past. The farm labor force became part-time, seasonal, retired state employees and forced labor brigades, with less than a personal interest in the physical or financial success of the farm. The store of small-farm experience and knowledge that came with the early "cooperators" was lost.

Free elections in 1990 replaced the Communist Party with a democratic Parliament. Laws were enacted to facilitate market reform. Land reform was one of those laws. Other than family and education, there is little that has more value than ancestral land. It was important, politically and socially to deal with the land question very early in the transformation period.

The Land Law

The Law for Land Ownership and Use was passed in 1991. TKZC's were abolished. Land would be returned to original owners, or their heirs, as defined by the 1946 Agrarian Reform Law. The small dispersed fields of 1946 would be divided by one or two more generations of "new owners." A representative real situation, that of Stoichko Georgiev Chevenyachki, a "new" Bulgarian farmer will help define the current situation.

A Real Situation

Stoichko's land is located near his ancestral village. He is ex-mayor of the village but lives and works as a teacher in a near-by city. The only people living in the village are retired. Young people were forced to move to larger cities to provide labor for state enterprises. His portion of his grandfathers' land (9.68

acres in 14 separated parcels) has been restituted to him.

STOICHKO'S FARM

Field Sizes

1.98 acres	2.47 acres	.25 acres
.62 acres	.74 acres	.12 acres
.62 acres	.12 acres	.49 acres
.05 acres	.67 acres	.49 acres
.07 acres	.99 acres	

Stoichko's problem is real, it's serious, and nearly everyone has the same problem. "What do I do with this land?" First, and most obvious, is deciding what to plant. Second, and of great concern, is how much to produce, since organized markets are, for the most part, are a thing of the past. Third, and fundamentally more difficult to answer, is how to produce. The art and science of small-scale agriculture has largely been lost through attrition.

Beyond the lack of capital to purchase traditional inputs (fertilizer, seeds, chemicals, and machinery) is the lack of training and experience in proper use. Technologies that TKZC production systems were dependent upon are, for the most part, not available to new farmers. Farmers are forced to return to the small-scale production system and methods of their grandfathers. Fourth, Stoichko struggles with how to combine his fields into larger more efficient units.

Hope and Success

The many small fields are being planted. Bulgaria's "new farmers" are optimistic and hard working. The future is not bleak. The first call for the small fields is vegetable and small fruit production for the family and forage production for the family livestock. Small grains are planted on most of the remaining plots. Primary tillage operation can be hired done if the family doesn't have adequate animal power or needed equipment. Most of the other field operations are done by hand. Farmers are devising ways and means to rent fields from each other to enlarge field size. Bulgarians themselves are amazed at the results. They are surprising themselves and quickly learning about and reaping the benefits of a privately owned and operated agriculture.

What at first glance, through the eyes of a "westerner", appears to be a step back into the past is in reality a major leap forward. Agricultural productivity is enhanced. Products with excess supply receive low prices and production is discouraged. Prices for products in short supply rise to encourage more production. Labor is relatively cheap and plentiful. Capital is almost non-existent and very expensive. Labor is substituting for capital as economic theory would suggest. People are well fed and working hard. Bulgaria's land reform policy is working. Thanks to the tenacity of Bulgaria's new farmers and the incentives provided by the free-market agriculture they are creating.